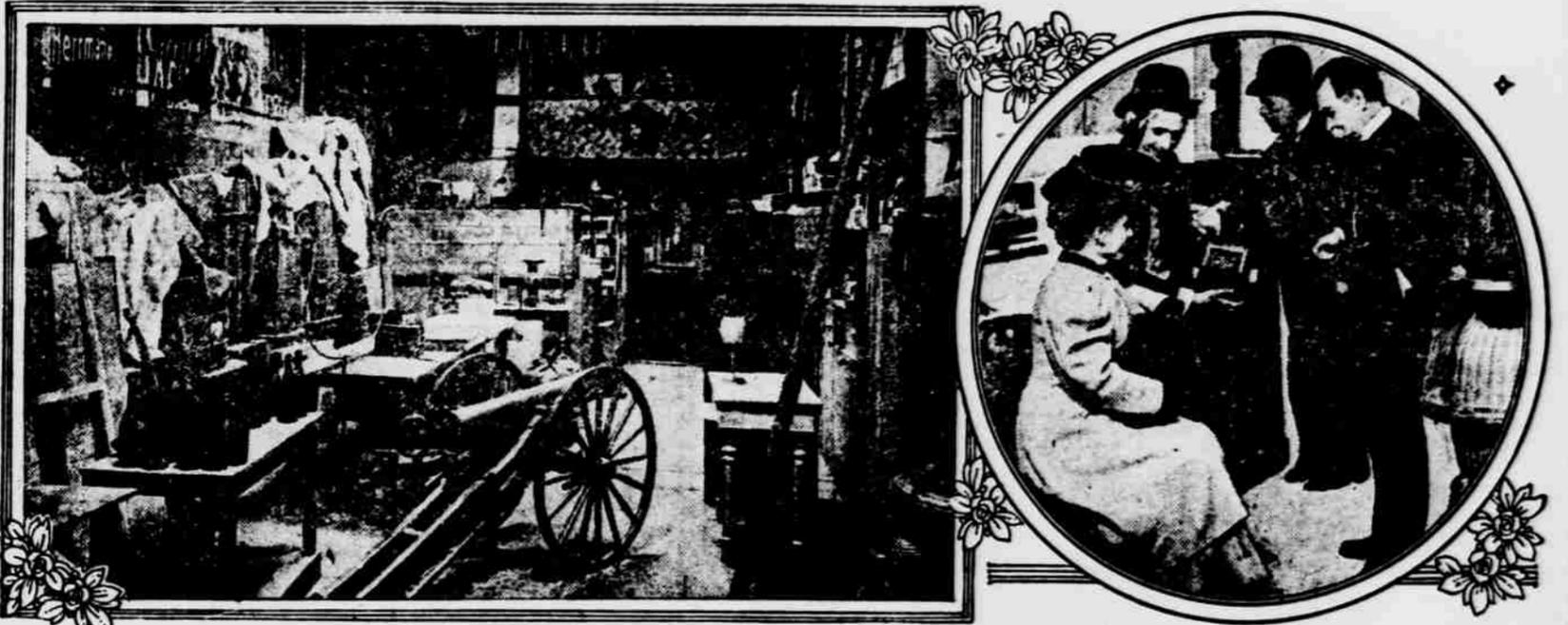


Passing of Black Magic Ends City Landmark

Francis Martinka, Maker of Apparatus for Two Generations, Retires and Tells of Glories of Illusions That Amused and Mystified the Public Throughout the World



The conjuror's shop where magic is originated. Martinka, the proprietor, is seen (back to stove) talking to magician customers.

By EILEEN O'CONNOR.

BLACK magic is passing. Its sombre hue has faded into pale gray. Soon, it is predicted, it will have disappeared in the white page of oblivion.

Francis Martinka says so and Francis Martinka knows. He is the spirit of the old conjurer's shop that for two generations has been a landmark to pedestrians, a stopping place for the rubberneck wagons that started at the various shifting centres of town and made their way to Chinatown.

For thirty-eight years Martinka manufactured the instruments which the artists of legerdemain used for the bewilderment and amusement of audiences. Manufactured and sold them in that old curiosity shop which has drawn the experts in black magic and those inquisitive about the art from the human stream that flowed down Sixth avenue.

He has travelled about the world from England to Cape Colony, from San Francisco to Ceylon, to study the methods and instruments of those who practised sleight of hand. Now he has sold his conjuror's shop and retired with his memories.

Theatre Where Wonders Were Shown.

Back of the shop and the workshop is a small theatre with seats for 100 persons. From the stage of this theatre a beautiful young woman once rose in air, apparently defying the law of gravitation. Gardens of beautiful flowers that seemed to bloom out of the air were first disclosed to view here. On this stage rapping hands knuckled messages to the amazed and spirit cabinets yielded their mystifying contents. These are only a few of the mysteries first presented to the world in this little theatre.

"The great days of magic are gone," says the little man with the snowy hair and mustache and the deep eyes in which thoughtfulness has deepened into half melancholy. "The art has declined. Its great men have grown rich and retired or they have died.

"Hermann is dead. Kellar has retired. His retirement marked the beginning of the end. Hermann and Kellar were the leaders, the fashion setters in magic. Clever men remain, but we have no Hermann and no Kellar.

"The proof of the passing of legerdemain has been in our sales. The rust gathers on the padlocks of our illusion closets. Three months may pass before a customer for illusion material comes, and the keys grow rusty in their locks.

"Kellar was very partial to his flower growing illusion. A movement or two, and flowers would spring up on the stage in a second. Other magicians and wealthy amateurs crowded our shop for material for this illusion. But when Kellar retired the fashion he had set waned. It has been three years since any one has asked for flower garden stuff.

"As the demand passed the prices lowered. Kellar's levitation trick first cost \$1,000. Now you can buy all its appurtenances for \$75. Kellar was a big man who handled things in a big way. His outfit cost him \$75,000. He paid \$5,000 for the trunks that conveyed his apparatus about the country.

"In Kellar's time I sold a trick cannon from which men seemed to be shot for \$1,800. That was the most expensive single article ever sold here. The cheapest was a ten cent pack of playing cards. But in these days of the decline of magic some of the most complex articles bring \$18 or \$20.

"The theatre you have seen was used for the annual convention of the Society of American Magicians. The number at the conventions dwindled to the size of a corporal's guard. At last we called off a convention that was to have been held at Carnegie Hall. We could not find a magician to conduct the performance.

"A reason for the abatement in popularity of legerdemain is that the greatest inventors are dead. Magic never recovered from the loss of Hermann. He was a man of such powerful personality that as he walked upon the stage his presence gripped the audience as the appearance of Edwin Booth gripped his audiences.

"Hermann was the Booth of magic. He was the greatest sleight of hand artist. Kellar was the greatest of illusionists.

"De Kolta was the inventive genius of the world of magic. You remember the flying fish? It was his. And the cocoon? That was his greatest illusion. Twenty-one years ago it was shown at the Eden Musee. The public called it the butterfly trick.

"De Kolta pasted a piece of white paper across a frame. On this he drew a picture of a cocoon. He struck the paper a blow with his arm and out came a big chrysalis. He struck the cocoon another blow and out of it came a monster butterfly that gradually changed before astonished eyes to a beautiful woman. The woman was Mme. De Kolta.

"Clever magicians are still with us. But the public shows its indifference by according them small audiences in New York. The local trade is dwindling, but we still have orders from the fakirs in far off India. Oh, yes, they buy from us."

Have Kept Secrets for Years.

Feats of magic the old manufacturer knows as he knows the features of his wife's face. Mme. Martinka was his chief assistant in the thirty-eight years he kept the conjuror's shop. Together they preserved the secrets of the sleight of hand artists, the mysteries of the masters of illusion.

But there are general truths which the smouldering eyed manufacturer of aids to mystery will willingly impart. The thumb, he will say to you, is the wizard's handicap. He did not intend a pun, nor do I. The sin of that thumb is the fault of some unpopular automobiles, its lack of speed.

There is a slighting allusion to the thumb in an old scold's phrase, "Your fingers are all thumbs." Which conveys the fact that the thumb is the most awkward member of the hand family. It requires much rehearsing to make of it a worthy companion for the nimble fingers. It gets in their way.

Cards are the alphabet of the magician's education. They are fundamental. Collaterally handling them trains the naturally clumsy thumb into something resembling dexterity and grace. Which statement reminds Mr. Martinka that a physical attribute of a successful great

magician is a deep palm; this to be accompanied by long fingers so nimble that they seem to twinkle.

Mental attributes? Ah, yes, very special these must be. The magician must be alert of mind, quick to apprehend, quick to decide. As for character, he must have enormous strength of will, be tenacious of an idea as a bulldog of grasp and have patience beside which the record of Job's will dwindle into atomic proportions.

A fundamental proposition of legerdemain is that the hand must be quicker than the eye. A glance of the untrained eye is one of the swiftest things in nature. But the movement of the highly trained hand is swifter. Unless the hand is trained to that higher degree of swiftness than the untutored eye there is no magic. The conjuror's art depends upon the lesser swiftness of vision.

Occasionally one of the great ones of magic deigned to explain his tricks to favored amateurs. In gregarious mood Leon Hermann once gave this lesson, gratuitously and out of love of wondering and inquisitive humankind.

"Suppose you undertake to make two cigarettes out of one. Take a cigarette of ordinary type between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand. A second cigarette must be held in the palm of the left hand in such way that the audience cannot detect it.

Patter With Cigarette Trick.

"Then say to your audience, 'As you perceive, I held between my fingers an ordinary cigarette. My assistant will show it to each of you to convince you that it does not secrete a hidden spring nor any mechanical contrivance. When he returns it to me I shall receive it, utter a few words in Egyptian, open my hand and you will see, not one cigarette, but two. While he is passing about among you I keep my arms extended full length as you see. I also draw up my sleeves so that you may see that no cigarette is hidden in their folds.'

"The assistant returns. You receive the returned cigarette in your left hand where the hidden one still remains, and opening your hand reveal the pair of cigarettes. The audience is mystified. It has been too intent upon watching your pockets and your sleeves to think of the simple hiding place in the other hand."

Of such are the simplest forms of legerdemain, dependent in part upon the comparative slowness of vision, in part upon the audience seeking the least probable hiding places.

Nine years ago, in the days of magic's prosperity, the Society of American Magicians gave a banquet to which it invited members of the press. Mr. Martinka recalls the discomfiture of the guests, who were greeted at the door by Allan Shaw, who removed unsuspected gold coins from their pockets.

While the journalists sat about the festal table Howard Thurston came for an individual chat with each of them, and abstracted kicking rabbits, shrieking geese and squawking hens from their evening attire. A young man found a gold watch embedded in his slice of bread, but regretfully returned it to its owner, Harry Kellar. All were mysteries which the

acute young men of the press were unable to solve.

Ching Ling Foo, a Chinese, as may be inferred from his name, was a favorite with New York audiences a little more than a decade ago. One of the most baffling of his devices was the simplest.

It consisted in having the strip of paper he held wrapped around his fingers cut into small bits by members of his audience and the original strip of paper reappearing whole.

Court Mystified by Trick.

Occasionally courts have been mystified by the sposties of magic. There is a legend of an English court at Lacknow bewildered by a woman fakir who had been arrested for swindling. She had been placed in jail.

Pending the trial of her case proceeded the unfolding of other cases. While the attorney for the Crown was pleading a quail flew in at the window and hopped about the floor, unafraid by the presence of humans, busily picking up imaginary grains.

"Remove that bird," ordered the court. "Shoo!" said the court officer.

Whereupon the quail vanished and in its place stood a man, one of presence so imposing that the court officer dared not say to it "shoo!" The Judge, looking up and seeing the stranger, asked "Who are you?" Came the reply "I am the woman whom you locked up for swindling."

A quick descent upon the jail by two court attendants. Bars secure. Cell empty. In the confusion that ensued the imposing man disappeared. Nor man nor woman nor quail was ever again seen in the court room at Lacknow.

But at this story of magic, as at all others told by himself or others, Martinka only smiles.

"I may not tell how it is done," answers the veteran purveyor to conjurors. "But the key that unlocks every mystery of magic is the highly trained hand quicker than the eye."

It is the epitaph the faithful artificer pronounces upon the soon to be forgotten art. He does not like that other designation, proposed by colder critics, "The profession of deceit." For, old Martinka argues, "it has been a pleasant form of humbug."

Burglars Dread a Noise

NOISE is the greatest enemy of the burglar and is what he most fears. Bear that in mind if you believe a thief has entered your home."

So says Frank McCarrick, lieutenant in Manhattan's downtown detective headquarters, whose long years in the Police Department give weight to his statements.

"The best of alarms in a household," he continued, "is a glass or chinaware pitcher or similar vessel. Slam it through the window and its crash above will be followed by another as the missile falls to the street or the areaway below.

"Never grapple with a midnight prowler, for he is prepared for such eventualities and has it on you. Generally no qualm of conscience would come between him and murder if there was danger of his being caught."